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CITY OF NEW YORK

DEPARTMENT OF AIR RESOURCES
51 ASTOR PLACE, NEW YORK, N.Y. 10003

ROBERT N. RICKLES, Ph.D., P.E., Commissioner

NEWS RELEASE

CONTACT:

John Leo
566-0109

Carolyn Konheim
566-8977

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ALL STATE LEGAL SUPPLY CO.

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"The nation's first regulations for the control of airborne asbestos went into effect this morning at 7:00 A.M.," announced Jerome Kretchmer, Environmental Protection Administrator-designate today.

"Twenty contractors throughout the metropolitan area were either handed or sent notice last Friday," stated new Air Resources Commissioner, Robert N. Rickles at City Hall.

"These are interim regulations to abate immediately this health hazard. Hearings on the health effects of asbestos exposure and specifically the spraying of asbestos in building construction will be held shortly," said Neil Fabricant, General Counsel for the environmental agency.

Asbestos is sprayed on steel supports during construction to prevent weakening in case of fire. Much of the material blows into the surrounding air and can be inhaled. Asbestos is a fibrous mineral which is virtually indestructible in lung tissue.

Dr. Rickles noted that a Subcommittee on Asbestos Hazards of the Health Research Council has reported. "Experience in industry clearly indicates that inhalation of asbestos may cause serious disease, and that asbestos related diseases may be found after exposure to relatively low levels of asbestos. The Committee therefore recommends that steps be taken immediately to eliminate contamination of the community atmosphere by asbestos "

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Dr. Norman Nelson, Chairman of the Air Pollution Working Group of the Health Research Council had been asked by former Commissioner, Austin N. Heller, last summer, to convene an inquiry into the problem. Diseases cited in the report are broncho-genic carcinoma, pleural calcification, pleural mesothelioma, and peritoneal mesothelioma. They found that "at the present time, practical devices for monitoring the ambient urban air for asbestos are not available."

"Since then," explained Dr. Rickles, "we have developed some capability to measure atmospheric asbestos. This has resulted from our joint study with Mt. Sinai Environmental Sciences Laboratory to define the community asbestos hazard which began last July." Eight asbestos monitors are in operation in lower Manhattan. The Mt. Sinai group, headed by Dr. Irving Selikoff, will conduct biological air sampling with hamsters.

The regulations require careful enclosure of work areas, interior open spaces, and materials to preclude escape of visible asbestos particulates. Persons entering enclosed areas are to be warned of hazards of entering and those spraying the material are to be supplied with protective respirators and coveralls which must be left at the site. Exacting cleanup procedures include removing all asbestos debris from air spaces or ducts and coating any asbestos materials in those areas with a sealant so that no fibres enter circulating air.

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